

INDUSTRY FOCUS

COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT DISTRICTS



PHOTOS/SPECIAL

A cyclist utilizes the Akers Mill Trail East in Cumberland CID at left; landscaping and hardscaping highlights the intersection of Paces Ferry and Cumberland, above.

How to see CIDs

SELF-TAXING DISTRICTS HELP COMMUNITIES KEEP UP WITH INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS

BY PHIL W. HUDSON
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Many Atlantans unknowingly drive, walk or bike on the contributions of community improvement districts every day.

Community improvement districts, or CIDs, are self-taxing business districts in which commercial property owners agree to pay a tax to fund infrastructure improvements and maintenance – things such as improved traffic management systems at congested intersections, wider sidewalks, pedestrian and bicycle paths, and landscaping designed to enhance the district's entry points.

The 1983 Georgia constitution allows for the creation and funding of CIDs. Metro Atlanta is home to 17 of them.

CIDs began as an effort to coordinate transportation planning and infrastructure but they rapidly morphed into landscaping, security and economic development, said Emory Morsberger, president of the **Stone Mountain Community Improvement District** who also helped create CIDs in Duluth and the U.S. 78 corridor in Gwinnett County. CIDs work in partnership with nearly all local, regional, state and federal government agencies to upgrade their areas.

The Stone Mountain CID, which is three years old, eliminated blight, reduced crime and improved curb appeal, Morsberger said.

"We are working with DeKalb County leadership to make it easier to get business licenses and expansion permits and we are teaming up with county and state economic development folks to increase our occupancy rates," he said.



An image of Pleasant Hill Road in Gwinnett Place CID.

SPECIAL

According to Morsberger, typically only a small group of property owners ever object to a CID because they feel that the city and county governments should provide all services.

"Generally, local governments are strapped and are unable to give commercial property areas the priority they desire," Morsberger said. "My experience has been that these early naysayers are surprised at the benefits that they receive after the creation of a

CID, and they ultimately get a lot more bang for their buck with a CID representing them."

CIDs have come in for some criticism, including that they can involve local governments in serious potential conflicts of interest by allowing developers to fund their public infrastructure with tax-free bonds, according to a 2011 blog post by Robert Wechsler, director of research for CityEthics.org, the website of City Ethics, a nonprofit organiza-

tion that provides information on local government ethics programs.

Morsberger said the primary benefit of a CID is that it can accomplish short- and long-term goals that individual owners and governments are unable to achieve.

"The CID concept, also known as BIDs (business improvement districts) in other cities, has been around since the

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VIEWPOINT

CIDs transforming the Atlanta region

Few economic development tools have had greater impact in the urban places of metro Atlanta than community improvement districts (CIDs). At a time when metro regions are becoming more essential to our global economy, it has become more difficult to build infrastructure and foster new growth in urban places.

CIDs are proven organizational entities that support and complement the role of local governments to



Dan Reuter is manager, Community Development Division, Atlanta Regional Commission.

manage and enhance major job centers and other urban places. A CID is a geographically defined, self-taxing district in which commercial property

owners voluntarily pay additional property tax and help manage the projects funded by it. The additional tax dollars raised through a CID are used within the CID boundaries to finance new services, beautification, transportation construction and other projects that benefit the properties and the people in the area. CIDs are quasi-governmental entities administered by a board of directors and hired staff.

During the past 25 years in metro

Atlanta, CIDs have been influential in advancing the efficient functioning of major job centers and urban communities of the region. CIDs have become a key model for advancing transportation projects. It could even be said that the economy of metro Atlanta and Georgia would not be functioning at its current level without the support that has been provided by numerous CIDs.

CIDs leverage their tax dollars to fund studies, engineering and construction of projects, as well as attracting state and federal funds by providing the "local match" required through many funding programs. The CID does not replace city and county infrastructure improvement programs, but supplements them by providing a means to more quickly advance projects. In addition to creating more safe and enhanced urban communities that attract new residents and businesses, CIDs have enhanced the region's transit services, particularly in the four CIDs with MARTA rail stations.

In recent years, many surveys have shown that young professionals and baby boomers all want to live in walkable places that require less driving to reach shopping, dining and services. Several of metro Atlanta's CIDs, like those in Midtown, Buckhead, Perimeter and Cumberland, are well on their way to creating these walkable environments for people of all ages.

In fact, a 2013 study of walkable urban places (WalkUPs) in the Atlanta region was conducted by Chris Leinberger of the George Washington University School of Business. The study shows that current and emerging WalkUPs account for less than 1 percent (0.55 percent) of metro Atlanta's land area. Yet, they are attracting an increasing share of new development and have seen a rise in rent premiums over suburban areas since 2009.

Increasingly, the job centers and urban communities of Georgia play an important role in retaining and attracting new global businesses and talented workers. Georgia has a proud history of cities and urban places that can compete economically with any state in the U.S. CIDs have been invaluable to supporting the renaissance of the city of Atlanta during the past two decades, as well as advancing the maintenance and creation of new infrastructure across the metro region.

While CIDs only tax commercial properties, the residential communities that surround the region's job centers and urban places benefit from enhanced public safety, beautification projects and more choices for retail or restaurants. Cities and urban places in Georgia must be safe and walkable, and must offer lifestyle choices that compete with the best urban communities worldwide. CIDs are helping deliver those choices and greater economic growth to our region and our state.

I M P A C T

"A founding principle of every CID is to move projects forward, faster. We have a history of moving quickly and decisively in North Fulton."

— Kerry Armstrong

Chairman, North Fulton CID



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COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT DISTRICTS

Red Top CID covers LakePoint area

BY JESSICA SAUNDERS
jessicasaunders@bizjournals.com



One of Georgia's newest community improvement districts is Red Top CID, whose boundaries surround the 1,500-acre, \$1 billion

LakePoint Sporting Community and Town Center, which is in the initial stages of development near Emerson in Bartow County.

Red Top CID's executive director is Jeff Lewis, who served 16 years in the Georgia House of Representatives. A Bartow County native, Lewis owns and operates Lewis Outdoor advertising agency and manages real estate in the Bartow area. He spoke with Atlanta Business Chronicle about getting the CID, named after Red Top Mountain, started.

Q: What was the motivation for creating Red Top CID? It was the capacities that CIDs bring to the table inasmuch as small or other local governments can do. Forming the CID would help complement a lot of the infrastructure needs of the sporting development and having an arm that can bring in grants and things of that nature, it eases the stress on the governments of Emerson and Bartow County supplying necessary services to a development of that size.

Q: What is the status of the LakePoint development now? The private side of the development is carrying on. Entertainment and lodging venues are being worked on, letters of commitment and contracts are ongoing ... Where it was lacking was resources for building streets and hard infrastructure, such as sidewalks, lighting, pedestrian walkways, and trails for hiking and biking. Those are things the CID can deliver.



Q: Are any of the commercial businesses in operation yet? No. As far as construction, there is a developer with a water wakeboard park and Perfect Game is in the process of having baseball fields developed. All pending CID members still have to develop their own sites before they are subject to any traditional property tax and/or any assessment for the CID.

Q: How is Red Top CID getting funding if there are no commercial businesses

operating to generate self-tax revenue? We have applied for a number of grants. We are pursuing those opportunities; hopefully we will learn in 30 to 60 days the number of grants we have been awarded.

Q: What kinds of grants has the CID applied for? The main grants are through SRTA, the State Road and Tollway Authority. SRTA is the primary source for grants and loans for CIDs. We are not ready for loans yet. There is also

a small federal grant we are applying for ...

Q: If awarded, what will the grant proceeds be used to build? The first round will go toward streets and that kind of thing.

Q: Does the CID have any projects underway currently? Yes, we are assisting the DOT in straightening out Highway 293, a dangerous intersection at Highway 41. ...



Announcements are made almost daily of companies large and small selecting Perimeter as their location of choice. Why? Because the Central Perimeter market offers employees and businesses a lifestyle in close proximity to transit, green space and quality housing. The region's largest concentration of health care facilities, world-class hotels and fabulous restaurants are all conveniently located in this exciting corporate center. What will you discover on your next visit to Perimeter?



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Map showing components of LakePoint development in Bartow County.

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VIEWPOINT

CIDs foster economic success in metro area

Over the past 25 years, community improvement districts (CIDs) have emerged as significant centers of influence and economic activity in the metro Atlanta region. These districts are serving to knit the metro region together with quality of life, transportation and public safety improvements in partnership with local and state government in ways that no single entity has the capacity to accomplish on its own. CIDs come in all shapes and sizes across our urban and suburban landscape. Within all CIDs, commercial businesses self-impose property taxes to invest in exponentially enhancing their communities in many tangible ways.

In 1985, then-state Rep. Johnny Isakson and then-state Sen. Roy Barnes successfully advocated for state legislation to allow for the creation of CIDs. Since then, 17 CIDs have been formed with more on the way soon. The youngest, in Bartow County and Tucker, were created just a few months ago. CID boards are comprised of dedicated stakeholders elected by member property owners. This governance structure allows decisions to be made by those who have



Michael E. Paris is president and CEO of the Council for Quality Growth.

directly invested in the communities in which their businesses reside.

The scope and quality of these investments is most obvious with major projects such as the interchange at Hammond Drive and Georgia 400, or the diverging diamond interchanges cropping up across the region, or the extensive freeway landscape and gateway improvements soon to be implemented, for example, in Midtown. Equally impressive are the streetscapes, pedestrian paths, signage, lighting and traffic flow and control systems embedded throughout these districts.

These improvements affect the everyday lives of those who live, work, play and shop within CIDs – even if most people don't realize who planned, funded or constructed them.

The property owners who have made the commitment for self-improvement recognize the benefit to their business and the resulting job creation. They also recognize how this commitment helps the tide to rise across the entire region. The economic multiplier of CID investments is significant. In metro Atlanta, our 17 active CIDs have collected more than \$463.8 million in tax revenue over the past quarter of a century and have leveraged this income to produce more than \$1.75 billion in investment value in public infrastructure and other improvements. These investments have:

- ▶ relieved congestion on our roadways through innovative projects,
- ▶ improved the safety of residents, employees and visitors,
- ▶ provided parks and green space for the enjoyment and recreation of all,
- ▶ incentivized companies to bring jobs to our communities and served as catalysts for economic growth,
- ▶ created rich environments for housing choices of all types,
- ▶ encouraged environmental sustainability and the use of alternative modes of transportation.
- ▶ provided bike and pedestrian pathways and helped to foster a sense of community and improve the quality of life in metro Atlanta.

Atlanta is a shining example for successful self-taxing improvement districts, and we are regularly held up around the nation as a model. But we are not alone or unique. According to the International Downtown

Association, there are over 1,000 of these districts throughout the United States, and there are others in Canada and a few European countries. In 2011, California alone had 232, and New York followed with 115 districts. Major metropolises throughout the nation have embraced these self-taxing catalysts for change, and CIDs – or Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) – can be found in many major cities, including New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C., among many others. The economic impact that these districts foster is documented. In New York City, which today boasts 69 BIDs, research has indicated that the commercial property values within a BID, on average, increase 15 percentage points above comparable properties in the same neighborhoods that exist outside of the district's boundaries. The impact of each district is of course dependent on the size, density and the individual goals that it chooses to pursue, but the power of these CIDs cannot be denied.

Metro Atlanta's CIDs are not resting on their laurels. As part of the CID Alliance (an informal forum for learning best practices, providing venues for education and information and representing their common interests), the CIDs will soon be more active in fostering better understanding of the benefits of CIDs in the community, encouraging discussion, and communicating important information, new ideas and best practices to its members. The alliance will serve a repository for research and data for all metro CIDs.

We are proud that all 17 metro CIDs are members of the Council for Quality Growth. We are pleased to partner with them in the lasting impact they make on our communities, our region and our state.

HOME RUN



Congratulations to Cobb County on a huge win! The Cumberland CID has spent over 25 years preparing for moments like these. It is why we do what we do. Now that the ball has been hit out of the park, the CID will continue to work with our partners to deliver the same type of successful projects that led us all to this moment.



METRO ATLANTA CIDs

Name	Street Address	City	Website
ADID (Central Atlanta Progress)	25 Peachtree St., Suite 13	Atlanta	www.atlantadowntown.com
The Boulevard (Fulton Industrial CID)	5686 Fulton Industrial Blvd., Unit 43851	Atlanta	http://boulevardcid.org
Braselton CID	3470 Village Way, Suite G	Braselton	http://braseltonlifepath.com/city-of-braselton
Buckhead CID	3340 Peachtree Road N.E., 100 Tower Place, Suite 1640	Atlanta	www.buckheadcid.com
Cumberland CID	240 Interstate North Parkway	Atlanta	www.cumberlandcid.org
Evermore CID	5525 Bermuda Road	Stone Mountain	www.evermorecid.org
Gwinnett Place CID	3700 Crestwood Parkway, Suite 680	Duluth	www.gwinnettplacecid.com
Gwinnett Village CID	5855 Jimmy Carter Blvd.	Norcross	www.gwinnettvilleage.com
Lilburn CID	3870 Lawrenceville Hwy., Suite C-106	Lilburn	www.lilburncid.com
Midtown Improvement District (Midtown Alliance)	999 Peachtree St., Suite 730	Atlanta	www.midtownatl.com
North Fulton CID	11605 Haynes Bridge Road, Suite 100	Alpharetta	http://northfultondcid.com
Perimeter Center CIDs	1 Ravinia Drive, Suite 1125	Atlanta	www.perimetercid.org
Red Top CID	P.O. Box 58	Emerson	http://redtopcid.org
South Fulton CID	318 Cherokee Ave. S.E., Unit 103	Atlanta	http://southfultondcid.com
Stone Mountain CID		Stone Mountain	www.stonemountaincid.com
Town Center CID	245 Townpark Drive, Suite 440	Kennesaw	http://tcacid.com
Tucker CID		Tucker	www.tuckercid.com

INDUSTRY FOCUS

VIEWPOINT

Perimeter a prime example of CIDs' benefits



Yvonne Williams is president and CEO of Perimeter Community Improvement Districts.

The saying "build it and they will come" is evident today around metro Atlanta and the community improvement districts that dot the region have played a major role.

As they have invested and leveraged millions of dollars to make infrastructure and quality-of-life improvements in their targeted areas, substantial economic development has resulted.

Central Perimeter is a prime example. Thanks to the foresight of the Perimeter business leaders who formed the Perimeter Community Improvement Districts (PCIDs) 15 years ago, the Central Perimeter Market today is one of the hottest in metro Atlanta. The PCIDs continue to lead the transformation of the once suburban car-dependent Central Perimeter area into a livable, walkable community that attracts corporate leaders such as Cox Enterprises, State Farm and AirWatch and thousands of new jobs.

When KDC recently announced plans for creation of a 2.2 million-square-foot transit-oriented-development for State Farm in the heart of the PCIDs, the commercial real estate development and investment company cited "direct access to a true live-work-play environment and a MARTA Station" as prime factors in the location choice. The project is being heralded as one of the largest corporate office developments in metro Atlanta's history.

In the last few years, Cox has relocated the headquarters of its AutoTrader.com and Manheim subsidiaries and The Atlanta Journal-Constitution to the Perimeter Market and in 2012 enlarged its corporate global headquarters footprint in Perimeter by two buildings totaling 600,000 square feet. Another 578,000-square-foot building under construction will come on line next year.

A national leader in finding ways to lessen the impact of businesses on the environment, Cox provides door-to-door shuttles from its various Perimeter buildings to one of the area's three MARTA stations and is looking forward to the commuter trails that the PCIDs

will be designing this year to enhance walkable access from office buildings to transit.

At a technology panel discussion hosted by the Perimeter Business Alliance last year, David Dabbieri, chief operating officer of the technology star AirWatch, said Perimeter "... is a great corridor for young people to move into." He cited the availability of transit and the many restaurants and Perimeter Mall near his company's location on Perimeter Center West.

The global mobile security company tripled its square footage in Atlanta with a move to Perimeter in April 2012 and expanded the number of its local employees from 500 to more than 1,000 today. VMware recently acquired AirWatch for \$1.54 billion, not bad for a company that's only 11 years old. AirWatch will remain in Atlanta following the sale, but will oversee some of VMware's operations and expects to continue adding jobs in the area.

This is only a snapshot of recent success stories in Perimeter where 50 corporations are headquartered today including Fortune 500s UPS, Newell Rubbermaid and First Data.

Clearly the PCIDs' work to improve traffic congestion and mobility through diverse forms of transportation has really paid off. But what now? How do prime markets such as Central Perimeter that contribute so much to local, regional and state economies sustain growth in the future? Will the people and jobs continue to come if we don't tackle our region's bigger transportation needs?

"How do prime markets such as Central Perimeter that contribute so much to local, regional and state economies sustain growth in the future?"

YVONNE WILLIAMS,
Perimeter CIDs

While CIDs are a great tool or funding smaller, localized transportation infrastructure needs and building the walkable places that urban analyst Chris Leinberger's study of the Atlanta region shows create economic development, they don't have the larger financial resources needed to implement projects such as the reconstruction of the I-285 and Ga. 400 interchange.

Nor can they implement the much needed east-to-west transit across the top end of metro Atlanta from the Cumberland market, with its growth, to the Doraville market, where the 165-acre former General Motors site offers redevelopment potential that could bring an estimated 9,000 jobs.

And CIDs can't provide the funding to expand MARTA to serve customers who need and want its services.

It's been noted time and time again that investing in infrastructure is critical to sustaining Georgia's strong business environment and fostering economic growth. What is it going to take to actually do this?

Atlanta has become an economic development magnet. To continue that pull, it is essential that we prioritize

and accomplish regional transportation improvement projects based on needs for access to jobs. And, we can't wait 20 to 30 years for improvements.

Research shows that the benefits far outweigh the dollars spent on transportation. Georgia can't delay any longer in boosting its transportation spending from the second lowest per capita in the U.S. if it is to remain the No. 1 business climate in the nation, according to Site Selection magazine.

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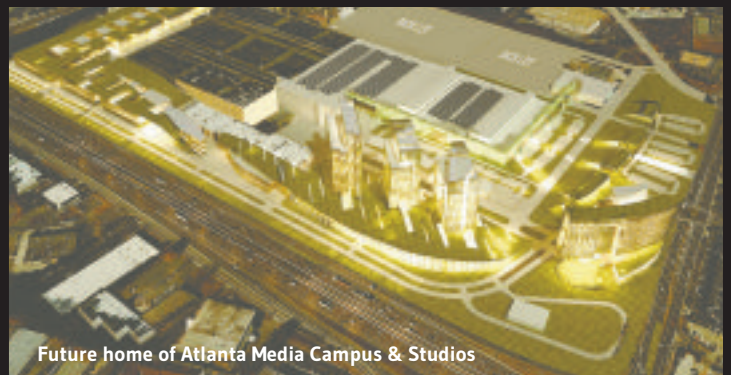
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INDUSTRY FOCUS

VIEWPOINT

Cumberland CID's success is model for region

Community improvement districts (CIDs) were formed in Georgia over 25 years ago to be a mechanism for private commercial property owners to invest in protecting and enhancing the value of their real estate.

CIDs invest private dollars in public infrastructure to grow and protect those values. The Cumberland CID, the first CID in Georgia, has served as a regional model over the years for how well this can work. In 1988, Cumberland's private commercial real estate values were estimated at \$1.2 billion. In part due to CID investment, that value has more than doubled to \$2.7 billion in commercial real estate values today. That's 220 percent growth for private commercial properties in the Cumberland CID. This tool has served our community well. It is this type of track record and transportation investment that allowed our community to realize the major win of the Atlanta Braves in 2013.

Our organizational mission has been to invest ahead of growth, to plan ahead of development and to strategize ahead of change. In our 25-year life, the Cumberland CID has completed 62 projects worth half a billion dollars in roads, sidewalks, streetscapes and other



Tad Leithead is the chairman of the Cumberland Community Improvement District's board of directors.

quality-of-life improvements for the community. We are currently advancing 26 more, five of which were advanced to construction in the past two years alone. By the end of 2015, almost three-quarters of the CID's total current projects' value of \$164 million in improvements will be under construction. We pay; everyone, including us, the commercial property owners, benefits.

A glimpse into some of those 26 projects highlights the major investment being made in the Cumberland area over the next few years: \$43 million in improvements for the Windy Hill and

I-75 corridor; \$53 million in enhancements for U.S. 41; newly constructed trails that build out the 25-mile CID network; and a new bridgescape for Cumberland Boulevard at I-75 that will serve as a gateway to the CID and Cobb County.

The recent announcement of the Atlanta Braves' move to Cobb County and the CID will be a catalyst for even more investments being made in our community. Over the next few years, we will continue to work hand-in-hand with Cobb County and our partners to implement close to \$1 billion in infrastructure improvements leading up to the Atlanta Braves move to the CID and Cobb in 2017. In addition to the projects I have already mentioned, the county is leading initiatives such as a Cumberland Circulator system for moving people throughout the district 365 days a year and improved access to the stadium site from surrounding roads and interstates. The county is also working to identify a high capacity transit system for the U.S. 41 and I-75 corridor. In 2018, the Georgia Department of Transportation will complete an \$830 million reversible managed toll lane system from the Cumberland area up I-75 to Hickory Grove Road and up I-575 to Cherokee County. The next few years will require

more of all of us. We will work together to implement the necessary projects that will ensure the Atlanta Braves have a smooth transition to Cobb County. We have the track record to prove we will do it successfully.

CIDs are at the forefront of keeping metro Atlanta ahead of the tremendous growth it has seen over the past couple of decades. Our region cannot thank CID founders like U.S. Sen. Johnny Isakson and commercial property owner John Williams enough for the vision and foresight they exhibited when they led the effort for passage of Georgia's law creating CIDs in 1984. I have had the pleasure of serving on the Cumberland CID board since early in its lifetime almost 25 years ago. Since then, I have been able to help other areas across our region take advantage of the CID model for advancing infrastructure projects in their respective communities. With the continual decline in public funds, it is of utmost importance that the people in our metro region understand what a CID is and why it is so important to metro Atlanta's growth.

CIDs are leading the way in creating the types of communities that attract residents, businesses and customers – all of which lead to jobs and economic growth.

SOUND OFF

FOUR LEADERS OF METRO ATLANTA COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT DISTRICTS ANSWER THREE QUESTIONS FROM ATLANTA BUSINESS CHRONICLE:

1. What is the biggest contribution or benefit created in metro Atlanta by community improvement districts?
2. What's the best project your CID has completed in the past five years and why?
3. What is the biggest challenge that metro Atlanta's CIDs face?



JOE ALLEN

Executive Director,
Gwinnett Place CID:

Contribution/benefit: We are able to be champions for our specific areas; working each day to improve our specific

area. CIDs are able to bring together stakeholders, power brokers, decision-makers and others to make things happen at the grassroots level. The CIDs lead the efforts to move solutions forward for the benefit of area businesses, employees, residents and visitors.

Best project: The award-winning Pleasant Hill Road over I-85 Diverging Diamond Interchange (DDI). It is the first DDI in Gwinnett County and the first eight-lane DDI in the USA. The DDI's efficiencies have resulted in a 51 percent decrease in the average number of stops and a 43 percent decrease in total delay along Pleasant Hill Road.

Challenge: Continuing to exceed the expectations of our commercial property investors. CIDs have enjoyed much success over the years, and we must keep that positive momentum going.



JIM DURRETT

Executive Director,
Buckhead CID:

Contribution/benefit: CIDs marshal the support and resources of the commercial property owners within the

district to make infrastructure and other improvements to support economic growth in the district and the region. CIDs address today's problems and anticipate and prepare for tomorrow's needs, and do this in a collaborative manner with many partners.

Best project: The Buckhead CID was formed to address as our first priority traffic congestion on Peachtree Road, a state route that runs through the heart of the Buckhead commercial center. In the past five years we have successfully transformed over one mile of Peachtree from what was effectively a sewer for cars into a complete street, helping Buckhead to become a walkable urban place.

Challenge: I would say that the biggest challenge is figuring out how to do more with less and finding creative ways to leverage other resources.



GERALD MCDOWELL

Executive Director,
Lilburn CID:

Contribution/benefit: Community improvement districts (CIDs) generate funding to produce enhancements in

a specifically designated and defined geographic territory. Improvements come in the form of increased public safety, infrastructure upgrades and overall area beautification.

Best project: When the Lilburn CID formed in 2010, its leaders immediately launched a six-month study of the current CID area. This early effort produced a five-year strategic plan consisting of more than 50 project ideas. The CID's enhancement goals included a 16-mile, multi-use trail network.

Challenge: Many commercial property owners are actually entities based outside of Georgia or even the Southeast region. Sometimes the positive changes and immediate impact for the specific CID area is lost in translation due to challenges of relaying relevant information across to areas where regional accomplishments are not necessarily easy to recognize.



LANIE SHIPP

Executive Director,
Town Center Area CID:

Contribution/benefit: Commercial property owners self-tax themselves within a defined community district for

improvements, especially related to the use and benefit of the district; thus providing sustainable value to the property owners and community at large.

Best project: The Big Shanty Extension has offered an east-west alternative, providing congestion relief to Barrett Parkway and Chastain Road. The total number of east-west trips through the study area increased by 39 percent with peak hour delay for the system decreasing by up to 50 percent, resulting in an annual benefit of \$3.3 million in travel time savings.

Challenge: The general population of metro Atlanta needs to be encouraged to look at the accomplishments of the individual CIDs as beneficial to the region as a whole. Public perception of who/what a CID is sometimes skews the effectiveness and the value of its contributions.

INDUSTRY FOCUS

COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT DISTRICTS

CIDs boost diverging diamond interchanges

BY TONYA LAYMAN
Contributing Writer

Driving on the wrong side of the road is a foreign concept for most Atlanta drivers, but it is something they are going to have to get used to as more and more communities are putting in diverging diamond interchanges to help maximize the flow of traffic in highly congested areas.

The diverging diamond interchange (DDI) allows free left turns for motorists, meaning vehicles don't cross opposing traffic. This requires motorists on the roadway to briefly drive on the opposite side of the road from what is customary.

The first in the state – at Ashford-Dunwoody Road and Interstate 285 – has been open for a year and has achieved what planners are calling phenomenal results.

Data shows the interchange has improved average travel time by 30 percent during the peak morning commute times and by 22 percent during the afternoon commute. It has decreased stopped time by 61 percent in the morning and 42 percent in the afternoon, said Yvonne Williams, executive director of **Perimeter Community Improvement Districts** (PCIDs).

"This is a national model that has been given award-winning designation by the Georgia Department of Transportation," Williams said. "I saw this interchange in our plans for improvement for years but there was never an opportunity to move the interchange forward. It was becoming more and more congested as Perimeter marketplace grew so I asked the board to find some funding to look at best practices in the nation. We took a risk and got DOT approval and moved forward with the project."

From concept to completion, the project took less than two years, which is unheard of when making interchange



The first eight-lane DDI is at I-85 and Pleasant Hill Road in Gwinnett County.

SPECIAL

improvements, Williams added.

In addition to the \$100,000 contributed by the organization to fund design, the PCIDs received \$800,000 from the **State Road and Tollway Authority** (SRTA) for this project, and the **Georgia Department of Transportation** (GDOT) awarded a \$4.6 million contract to **E.R. Snell Contractors Inc.** of Snellville for the DDI project.

"This is one of the best examples of innovation we have seen in a long time in the state. People have identified with it as it is very visible," Williams said.

It is because of success like this that GDOT is looking at other areas where this model can be executed, said GDOT Atlanta Regional Media Coordinator Mark McKinnon.

"This is a very innovative interchange that has worked well in other states, and so far the ones in Georgia are working well," he said. "We are looking to utilize this design in areas where we think it will work, which would be those high-volume areas where you need to get more cars through efficiently."

McKinnon said this is a faster solution than rebuilding roadways and bridges because the team can use existing roadways and bridges, meaning they don't have to secure new rights of way, which can be a time-consuming process.

And the price tag is manageable and cost effective, he said.



Joe Allen

That was one big selling point on the design for Joe Allen, executive director of **Gwinnett Place Community Improvement District**, which recently helped fund the second DDI in the state at Pleasant Hill Road and Interstate 85 – the county's first eight-lane DDI.

"We did focus groups and studies

asking people 'why don't you come back to the Gwinnett Place area' and the answers weren't 'you don't have what I want.' Instead, it was 'I hate the traffic on Pleasant Hill,'" Allen said.

The group looked at several options to solve the traffic problem, but it was the DDI that stood out over some designs that would have cost upward of \$58 million.

"We were able to do this project for about \$7 to \$8 million and use the existing bridge structure which is still a good, solid, sound bridge and able to do it cheaper and faster and with minimal right-of-way impacts," he said. "It is working great and has more than exceeded my expectations. We have been getting positive feedback from motorists and property and business owners in the area."

In preliminary studies of the interchange's impact, Allen said, the findings showed a 51 percent decrease in the average number of stops and a 43 percent decrease in total delay for motorists.

In addition to the diverging diamond design, the project called for more landscaping, lighting and pedestrian-friendly amenities. The project was funded by the Gwinnett Place CID and Gwinnett County SPLOST (Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax) funds. It opened in June 2013.

This design also lends itself to safety. The reduction in the number of conflict points should equate to fewer accidents in the area, Allen said.

Chuck Warbington, executive director of **Gwinnett Village Community Improvement District**, is eager to drive on Gwinnett's second DDI, being constructed at Jimmy Carter Boulevard and I-85.

"It is one of the worst-congested interchanges in the county, but to totally repair the bridge and add additional lanes would cost \$79 million and there is not a lot of money lying around," he said. The DDI can decrease congestion by 45 percent to 50 percent and cost only \$5 million, he said.

"At some point we will need to add

capacity and additional lanes and replace the bridge but this is buying us time while cutting down on the congestion," he said.

Funding sources include the CID, Gwinnett SPLOST dollars and SRTA funds. The project is slated to open in late spring.

"We already have two great examples of this design in our region, and I hope ours will be the third great success story," Warbington said.

It is likely that the fourth DDI in the region will be in Cobb County. **Cumberland Community Improvement District** is moving forward with plans to rehab the entire stretch along Windy Hill Road from Powers Ferry Road to U.S. 41. A big part of that project will be the transformation of the interchange over I-75 to a DDI, said Executive Director Malaika Rivers.

"Cumberland CID has been looking at ways to improve that interchange since the day we started more than 25 years ago. The concept that has emerged in



Malaika Rivers

the diverging diamond interchange and the big difference between that and other proposed solutions is it allows us to keep the existing structure," Rivers said. "This will change traffic flow and patterns at a fraction of the price so it will deliver a great deal of benefit at a great value to the community."

The CID is still securing funding for the project but there is a commitment for federal funds and county dollars in addition to CID outlay. The whole project, which will begin later this year, will cost \$43 million with the DDI portion being \$20 million. The DDI construction will not begin until late 2015 but Rivers said it will be open before first pitch when the **Atlanta Braves** move to Cobb in 2017.

► DDIS IN THE REGION

Ashford-Dunwoody Road: Opened in March 2013

► Delays down by up to 30 percent;
Stop time down by 61 percent

Pleasant Hill and I-85: Opened in June 2013

► Preliminary studies show a 51 percent decrease in the average stops and a 43 percent decrease in delays.

Under construction: Jimmy Carter Boulevard and I-85

In the planning stage: Windy Hill Road and I-75

INDUSTRY FOCUS

VIEWPOINT

CIDs – Filling the gap in our communities

Community improvement districts (CIDs) are known by many different names around the country. However, this model of public-private partnerships has proven to be a successful one. Similar to homeowners associations, which are funded by property owners who have a vested interest in protecting and enhancing their residential investments, CIDs are made up of commercial property owners who band together to work toward the promotion and enhancement of their centers of commerce.

Infrastructure serves as our economy's circulatory system – the more efficiently it works, the more we thrive. Since the beginning of time public investment in infrastructure has spurred private investment alike. And this is the foundation upon which CIDs are built.

Since the Cumberland CID was formed in 1988, the districts have proliferated across metro Atlanta, generally centering around urban centers or other concentrated areas of employment. None of the CIDs operate in exactly the same way, but generally they all work to improve their areas by focusing their investments on infrastructure that benefits the surrounding community.



Chuck Warbington is executive director of the Gwinnett Village Community Improvement District

In these days of dwindling transportation dollars, it has become increasingly necessary for a local partner to advocate for improvements in their community. Given the fact that the transportation needs in our region continue to grow with the population, while funding levels have stagnated and even waned, competition for project funding is more fierce than it has ever been. Georgia's motor fuel tax, which is not indexed for inflation, has not been raised since 1971. Since that time, fuel efficiency standards have increased – thus lowering the amount of

fuel consumed and subsequently depleting contributions to the state transportation fund.

The transportation funding picture on the federal side is even worse. The lion's share of the Highway Trust Fund is fueled with federal gas tax revenues and is therefore subject to the same declines seen at the state levels. The fund required general revenue support to cover shortfalls of \$8 billion, \$7 billion and \$19.5 billion in 2008, 2009 and 2010, respectively.

State and local agencies have been facing this reality for some time now and have been finding ways to stretch those dollars to accomplish more with less. In many cases, that means sharing the burden between multiple partners, building a coalition around each individual project, and even providing innovative and cost-efficient design solutions such as the diverging diamond interchanges.

To receive funding, it helps to have someone with local knowledge who has the resources and background to make a strong case for local enhancements. CIDs fill that role and generally provide seed money to jump-start a project. They devote funding to studies that help

to quantify the needs they observe in their given district. Once a case is made, CIDs work with local, state and federal partners to implement projects that they could likely not afford to construct on their own. This allows the CIDs to provide a return on investment to their property owners while also benefiting those funding partners by providing a motivated local partner who is willing to put their own funds toward advancing strategic projects.

Make no mistake though, these improvements are not free. CID property owners pay an additional tax that commercial owners outside CID boundaries do not. They have weighed the costs and benefits and determined that it is worth the price.

CIDs can't be all things to all people, but their results-oriented approach has yielded significantly positive results for property owners who have made that choice to invest in their area. By acting as a strategic link between the private and public sectors, CIDs are able to undertake initiatives to improve mobility, enhance community appeal and increase public safety – things that individual property owners would be hard-pressed to accomplish on their own.

VIEWPOINT

Fulton Industrial turning a new leaf in 2014

The Fulton Industrial district has been an important industrial district, as well as a jobs and economic engine in the Atlanta metro region since the 1960s. However, like many aging industrial districts throughout the country, in the 1990s and 2000s, Fulton Industrial experienced increased difficulties competing with newer industrial districts in neighboring counties, due largely to its outdated building stock, lack of supportive infrastructure such as roads that facilitate freight mobility and safety, increased crime, lack of supportive businesses to serve the district's workforce, and lack of coordinated clean and beautiful programs to maintain the district at the same level as newer self-contained industrial parks operated under one management with common area maintenance.

In late 2000s, however, a group of public- and private-sector leaders recognized that without a coordinated, strategic effort to revitalize the Fulton Industrial district and change the negative physical and perceived aspects of the district, businesses would continue to leave the area for greener pastures and the Fulton Industrial district's ability to attract new businesses would become increasingly more difficult.

A major step towards the implementation of this comprehensive revitalization strategy was the creation of the Fulton



Gil Prado is the executive director of the Fulton Industrial CID.

Industrial CID in October 2012. Since then, the Fulton Industrial CID has led ambitious efforts to revitalize the Fulton Industrial district, first by creating a stakeholder- and public-driven master plan that set forth the vision, built consensus and created a blueprint to attract future investment into the district.

With the completion of the master plan in October 2013, the CID has wasted no time, moving immediately into implementation of the plan and applying for \$398,000 in grant funds from the State Road and Tollway Authority's Georgia Infrastructure Transportation Bank to fund needed transportation improvements that would not only facilitate freight mobility and safety in the district, but also kick-start the revitalization

efforts of the I-20/Fulton Industrial Boulevard interchange area with the addition of monument and wayfinding signage. Additionally, the CID has recently applied for another \$47,000 in grant funds from GDOT to help landscape these areas and further improve the appearance of the "front door" of the district. Both applications are pending award decision.

Additionally, the CID stepped up public safety efforts in partnership with Fulton County Police, which has resulted in a 15 percent drop in crime in the district. These efforts, combined with the CID's continued weekly landscaping and maintenance of Fulton Industrial Boulevard and Great Southwest Parkway has substantially improved the look and feel of the district as well.

With district conditions improving throughout 2013, changing negative perceptions built up from news from years past highlighting the area's high crime and blight will become a major focus of the CID in 2014. In fact, on March 14, the CID is launching a new district brand, which will include a new logo, website, original photography, maps, marketing and promotional materials with the goals to raise the district's profile, increase communication and inform the public and business community of the good things happening in the district.

With increased interest in the Fulton Industrial district, we are currently

working in partnership with Fulton County and multiple public agencies and service providers to address increased demand in the district's infrastructure, including: roads, transit, heavy rail, phone, broadband, power and water. This effort will help assure the Fulton Industrial district can meet increased demand on services and infrastructure needs and will also prepare the district to be able to accommodate 21st-century industries.

The Fulton Industrial district is known as the largest industrial corridor in the eastern United States. The district boasts 46 million square feet of warehouse space, 533 industrial buildings, 20,000 workers and close to \$1 billion in payroll. Although there are many challenges associated with the district, its location has always been very attractive to industry due to its ease of access and close proximity to major regional, national and international access points including: I-20, I-285, downtown Atlanta and Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport and two intermodal rail yards.

At a recent local economic development conference, upon conclusion of a presentation about the Fulton Industrial CID by the board chair, a crowd of about 500 people clapped. A gentleman sitting next to me in the audience said he never thought he would see the day that people would clap for Fulton Industrial. I said: "Well, that day has come!"

INDUSTRY FOCUS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 25A

1970s. They are being used to effect very positive change in most of the top 20 cities in the U.S.," Morsberger said. "Metropolitan Atlanta has about the same concentration per capita as other cities, but we seem to be lagging behind on implementation of CIDs in the urban sectors of the city."

The **Gwinnett Village CID** began in 2005.

According to Morsberger, it has helped dramatically reduce crime and blight while also assuring that its infrastructure would meet the demands of projected growth.

"The 'curb appeal' of the area went from an F to an A-minus in just two short years. After the completion of current road projects, it will be an A-plus. It had a dramatic impact on the property values and quality of life in southwest Gwinnett," Morsberger said.



Emory
Morsberger

The three CIDs in formation around Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport will work with six local governments to turn the area around the world's largest airport into an economic juggernaut of job and income creation that the entire Southeast will respect, Morsberger said.

In Gwinnett County, the four CIDs were specifically created with the purpose of revitalizing an economically challenged area, said Chuck Warbington, the executive director of the Gwinnett Village CID.

"Even in a short time frame, in all four cases, the added investment by the business community has decreased crime and traffic congestion while providing much-needed attention to the overall appearance of the area," Warbington said.

In other parts of the United States, CIDs are mainly centered around large urban areas, Warbington said.

"For example, the Atlanta Downtown CID, otherwise known as **Central Atlanta Progress**, is very similar to BIDs across the U.S. that have a large concentration of urban commercial activities," Warbington said. "Where CIDs differ in Georgia than the rest of the U.S. is the fact that suburban areas (Gwinnett and Cobb) and small municipal areas (Briselton and Lilburn) have taken the model and created small districts to improve their business climate."

The **Red Top CID** is a result of that same dynamic. The CID, which encompasses areas within the **city of Emerson** and **Bartow County**, was founded in the summer of 2013 to enhance and leverage the development of infrastructure needs that might otherwise put a strain on local governments, said Jeff Lewis, executive director of the Red Top CID. The CID's boundaries enclose the master-planned, 262-acre, \$1 billion LakePoint Sporting Community and Town Center underway in Bartow County.



PHOTOS/SPECIAL

Aerial of Gwinnett Village landscaping at Indian Trail and I-85, left; Lake Hearn at Perimeter Summit, above.

The **Cumberland CID**, which was the first in the state of Georgia, is responsible for Cumberland Boulevard, a 5-mile loop road that encircles the Interstate 75/Interstate 285 interchange.

Since 1988, Cumberland's commercial real estate assets have increased in value 243 percent to just under \$3 billion today. Add in residential property value, and the total assets exceed \$4.1 billion, according to the Cumberland CID.

"In our 25-year span, we have raised more than \$125 million. Clearly, there is

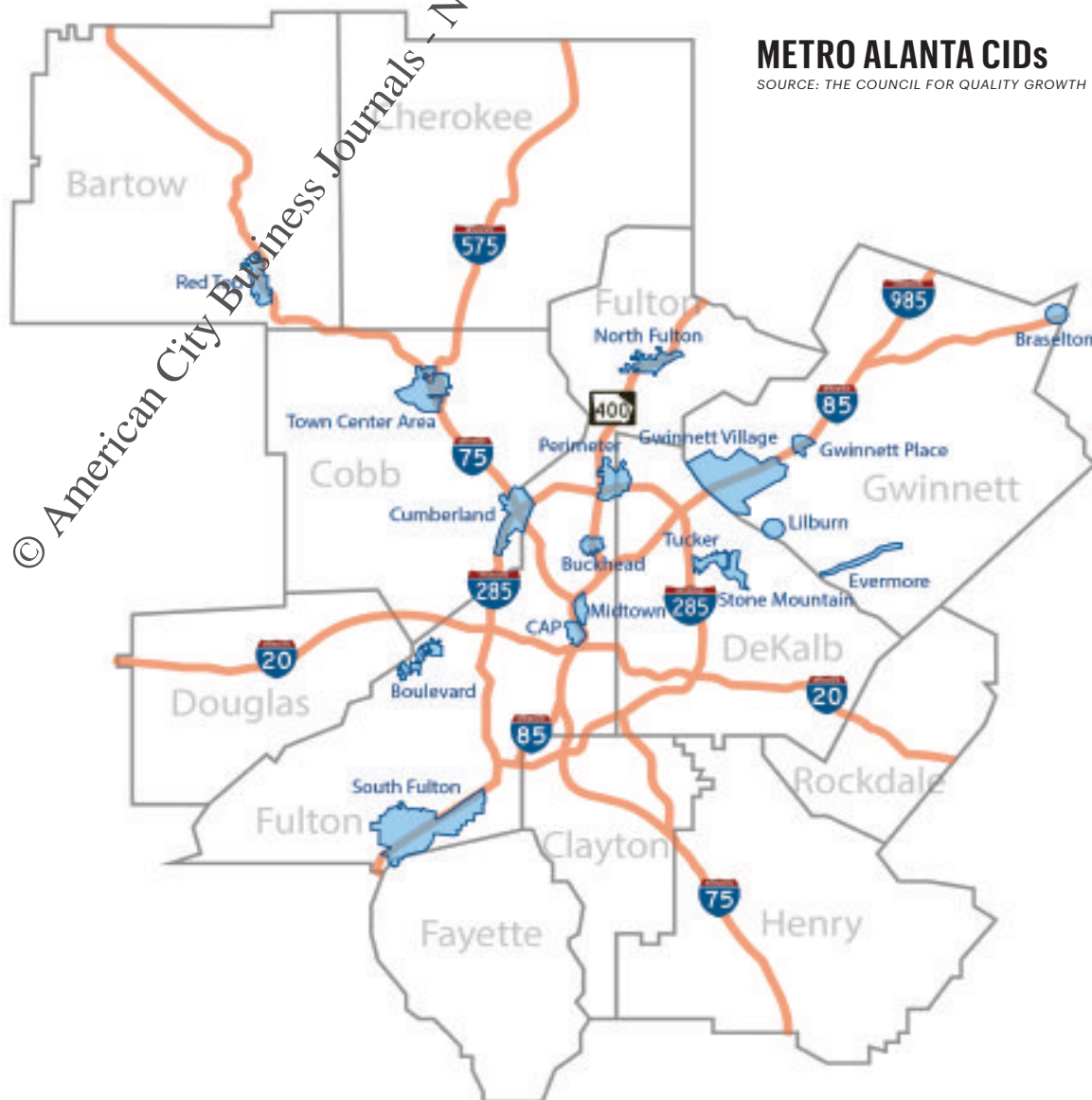
a great return on investment," Malaika Rivers, executive director of the Cumberland CID, said.

The Cumberland area could realize \$1 billion in investment within three years from the Atlanta Braves' new stadium and adjacent mixed-use development.

"Our engagement in the stadium was to be part of the county's financial package that it put together with the Braves. The CID committed \$10 million of the \$300 million public commitment," Rivers said.

The public should keep in mind that planning and delivering transportation projects is a multiyear effort, she said.

"We have projects that have been in the pipeline for more than 20 years. For instance, the Windy Hill interchange is going to be delivered as a diverging diamond," Rivers said. "Corresponding projects that are also along that corridor have been in the pipeline for a very long time and they will be open in time for opening pitch in April 2017."



METRO ATLANTA CIDs

SOURCE: THE COUNCIL FOR QUALITY GROWTH